Energy in Somatic Psychotherapy

by Andreas Wehowsky

Speech given at The First Dutch Symposium for Body-oriented Psychotherapy, Driebergen 1998

Introduction

The place of energy in somatic psychotherapies is a prominent one. Due to Reich's principle of functional identity and antithesis, energy as orgone energy is understood as the primary source of both soma and psyche. It is the deeper ground which manifests in both of these realms. Reichian therapies therefore show a strong engagement to understand and work with this basic, functional ground of our being. But, as we know, in recent discussions, forwarded by famous therapists like Peter Geißler and George Downing, the so called energy paradigm is put into question, not to say it is openly abandoned[1]. So we do have what the American Professor Mark Woodhouse calls a „paradigm war", a conflict between those who follow the energy paradigm and those who dismiss it[2]. In this conflict, many issues are at stake. Not only the way we work with our clients, but also our scientific and political reputation and recognition. In other words, the question how we view energy in our work might be decisive in the competition between body-psychotherapeutic schools for achieving social acceptance. If some schools try to get this acceptance by turning down the energy paradigm, others which still maintain it might have harder times to get acceptance as well. The role of energy in somatic psychotherapies, originally regarded as a unifying ground, might become the issue on which the movement diverts or even splits, with severe political consequences. Therefore it is important to look at some questions which might help to clarify some of the confusions in the present discussions. Two questions need to be distinguished from the beginning. The first addresses the nature or definition of energy, the other addresses the way in which this understanding is applied in practical work. I will turn first to the question how we define and understand energy.

1. Energy in the natural sciences

A basic distinction to be made is between conventional and unconventional energies. In physics, conventional energies are the four forces of gravitational, electromagnetic, and weak and strong nuclear energies. There are many discussions around unconventional energies, speculations about unifying fields from which these four forces derive, and models of multidimensionality beyond the space-time realms, but these seem still to be far from definite conclusions.

In biology, conventional energies are described by biochemistry, referring to the metabolic processes in organic bodies, to bio-electricity and biophotonic radiation, which is understood as an electromagnetic radiation of biological matter. As in physics, there are also discussions about unconventional energies beyond electromagnetic radiation, so called non-Hertzian energies, or about non-energetic informational fields like Sheldrake's morphogenetic fields, but

again, these are hypotheses which move beyond conventionally accepted energies and realities. Orgone energy falls into this latter category of unconventional energy, as orgone energy is understood as being beyond electromagnetism.

It is obvious that the disputes about energy are not related to conventional energies in physics or biology, as everybody agrees on these, but about the existence and nature of these unconventional energies. As these are under dispute, to simply claim them as existent is a scientifically dangerous maneuver, if not to say naivete. If there is not enough care to distinguish a hypothesis or even belief from an already proven reality, scientific credibility is lost fast.

Thinking scientifically it is of importance to distinguish carefully between causes and effects. As research into healing shows, we have huge evidence of unconventional effects which cannot be explained by conventional causes. Therefore it is necessary to look for new explanations, to do research into unconventional realities, but the easy mistake is to prematurely claim the discovery of unconventional energies to explain unusual effects. In relation to orgone energy, we do have a lot of research which significantly documents and proves biological-medical effects, but there is still no definition from mathematics or physics to define orgone energy itself. To put it into simple words: yes, there is something unusual going on, we do have measurements of unusual effects, but so far it is hard to say what caused these. We can prove that something is going on by its effects, but we don't really understand it's causative nature yet. Even if we have measurable energetic effects, we don't even know if the cause is an unconventional *energy* and not some form of *information or consciousness.*

In the American Journal "Network", these questions were recently seriously discussed in a debate between Larry Dossey and Mark Woodhouse. Dossey, well known by his books on consciousness and healing, claims that unconventional subtle energies can not be defined in terms of natural science, thus, much talk about energies is purely metaphorical. I think this is a point which is also true for some usage of the word in body-psychotherapy. Interestingly enough, it was Reich's criticism on Freud that his use of energy was metaphorical and not grounded in science. Reich first grounded an understanding of libido by relating it to the vegetative processes of the autonomous nervous system, but later developed his deeper understanding of a more primary energy which he called orgone. Although orgone energy is characterized by certain properties, still it cannot be defined and measured directly in terms of natural science. Because of this difficulty, we are back to a sometimes metaphorical use of the word energy on a level beyond the vegetative understanding.

Another point Dossey makes is that many people talk about energy as being transmitted in distant healing for example, yet there is no evidence that any energy is transmitted at all. The effects of distant healing, which are proven, are much more likely due to the nonlocal character of consciousness and focussed intention, so Dossey. What is transmitted is information. Therefore, his proposal is to regard consciousness instead of energy as a primary foundation of events. This is in tune with other scientists who argue in favor of fields of information as being more basic than energy.

Mark Woodhouse, who is Dossey's opponent in this debate, is warning against

edding the baby with the bathwater. He ims that even if we can't prove subtle ergy by conventional science yet, the cient traditions of working with chi or ina as well as the intersubjective verifi-ions of clairvoyant descriptions of subtle ergies give some evidence of their stence, even if we can't give a descrip-n of healing energy apart from its ects. Woodhouse therefore suggests to jard energy and consciousness as two jects of each other *"neither being sepa-e from, or reducible to, the other"*, so at the unity of energy-consciousness is expression *"of a single, probably inde-able, universal 'source'"*.

Taking this position, Woodhouse supports at the perennial traditions in favor of otle energies always claimed, that these ergies are intrinsically related with con-ousness and that they are the missing k between the intentional mind and the ysical body, functioning as a two way nveyor belt by transferring the impact matter to mind and by imposing the entionality of mind to matter, as Ken lber put it. This mutual influence bet-en consciousness and energy is a key int in somatic psychotherapies, as I will ow later.

To summarize our discussion so far, we n say that we can talk about energy in matic psychotherapy at least on three vels.

1. The conventional level of vegetative ergies, related mainly to the autonomous rvous system.
2. The level of biophoton radiation, which a regulatory communication system thin and between biological bodies nctioning at the speed of light.
3. The level of assumed subtle energies, cluding orgone energy, with properties yond the known forces of physics.

From these different levels certain terms describing energetic processes are derived. The key terms of vegetative energies are excitement, arousal and charge, with the associated rhythms of intake, charging and discharging or release. The key terms of biophoton radiation are vibration or frequency, storage capacities, especially of macro molecules like DNA, and coherence or degrees of order. The key terms of orgone energy are pulsation, lumination, accumulation of energy, and its capacity to build structures and to self-organize.

Naturally there is a lot of overlap between these terms and levels. Yet there is a reason why I differentiate these levels. It has often been said that Freud's understanding of energy was quite mechanical or hydraulic in nature, which means that too much charge needs to be released or it creates tensions which manifest as anxiety or neurosis. Reich showed with his vegetotherapy how these tensions manifest as chronic patterns of armoring and stasis, the physiological correlate of neurosis. This understanding paved the way for the therapeutic strategies of release and catharsis, which became overemphasized in classical bioenergetics and some other Reichian therapies. Yet the concept of orgone energy moved beyond a mechanical understanding of energy into the realm of healthy accumulation and storage of energy, higher levels of lumination and pulsation with potentially higher levels of storage and coherence. Accordingly, tensions are not necessarily to be released, but could be creatively adapted to in order to adjust to higher levels of intensity and excitement. Such a creative approach to tensions was already understood by Kurt Goldstein in his organismic theory of self-realization, a foundational approach for the humanistic psychotherapies. Recently, the biologist

Mae-Wan Ho emphasized the importance of energy storage in combination with energy flow. Other research into brain wave patterns confirms the same thought that hyperaroused states which have a high level of order are the basis for altered states of consciousness, or states of consciousness which function beyond the normal range of experiences.

In other words, if we want to access more encompassing states of consciousness or want to move into metanormal and transpersonal stages of development, we need an understanding of their energetic foundations. These foundations are not just quantities of energy, but quantities of energy in combination with free flow and high degrees of order or coherence. This suggests a strong alternative direction to work with energy instead of the old emphasis on catharsis. It indicates the possibility of an integration between the energy principle of working with charge and the formative principle of working with progressive orders of integration within the individual.

2. Energy in social systems

The critics of the energy paradigm emphasize that energy work in body-psychotherapy tended to be restricted to intrapersonal processes within the individual and to leave out the interpersonal relational processes including transference and countertransference. While this is certainly true for a large part of body-psychotherapeutic practice, it is not a reductionism implied by the energy paradigm itself, but a reductionism in its application. To criticize the energy paradigm itself and to reverse the swing of the pendulum into the other direction of focusing on the relationships to the dispense of energy work is only replacing one reductionism with another, again splitting energy and contact, this time in favor for the latter. This is all the more astonishing, as Reich's conceptions clearly involve relational issues. The concept of superimposition between orgonotic systems as well as his concept of pulsatory movements of towards, against and away from contact indicate how to understand energetic functions within relationships. Furthermore, the concepts of vegetative resonance describe the energetic foundation of what is called attunement today, and the concept of vegetative identification describes the energetic foundation of processes like projective identification and empathy. Unfortunately, this is little understood and evolved within the somatic psychotherapies. In Biosynthesis, David Boadella always taught the principle that a gram of contact is more important than a kilo of energy, but this principle was rarely at the expense of energy work.

Yet it is true that we do need a lot of theoretical refinement of these concepts to match the differentiation of relational processes taught in other psychotherapy mainstreams. This is not to be understood as a purely parallel development, but as a complementary understanding how relational and energetic processes are always interconnected, how they are simultaneous aspects of an overall process. How could we possible look at relationships without understanding energetic ways of relating, and how could we possible look at energetic events without understanding relational contexts? To separate these two aspects might reflect old cultural dualities and might reflect the high demand on a therapist to monitor both aspects simultaneously, but the separation is not immanently given with the energy paradigm itself.

ıst to give some examples how energy relationships are intimately connected. In kinesiology, the psychiatrist John nond, pioneer on the field of psychoatic medicine, clearly describes how the -verbal states and expressions of any ›on immediately affects other persons erms of weakening or strengthening ir energy system. Diamond looks ːifically at the energy flow within the idian system to prove these effects. Any ›d or thought we have is subtly influng the energetic patterns of somebody we are in contact with.

The Jungian analyst Nathan Schwartznt works with sophisticated skills to slate perceptions of subtle energetic ls into imagery, thus truly mediating veen energy and consciousness as two ːcts of a unified process. The sharing communication between therapist and ıt of a mutually evolved imagery is part ıe therapeutic process which is highly ıged with the actual energetic events, hey gross or subtle.

In systemic therapies which use group ıbers to arrange family constellations ıe space of the therapy room it is a known phenomena that the icipants get into very specific energetic esses, sometimes even depending only vhere in space they are posited or in ːh angle their body is related to the agonist. The awareness of these events ne of the major tools to reconstruct reframe the family system.

leliberately chose these three examples outside body-psychotherapy in order ›en our minds for possibilities we might ː lost sight of.

3. Energy in subjective experiences

As natural science aims to understand objectively what energy is and what it does, our internal experience of energy represents the subjective side. The major question here is how we relate to our energetic states and fluctuations and how we are able to handle and regulate these. Relating to our energetic experiences involves first of all perception and mindfulness, which is developed to very different degrees in different individuals. A major task of body-psychotherapists is to help their clients to develop this mindfulness, which can be done by questions leading the awareness to the felt experiences and also by suggesting certain exercises to mobilize, express or contain energetic events. Movement, breathing and emotional expressions are the dominant tools to promote a deeper mindfulness and connection to body, feelings and emotions. Since the subjective experience of energy is related strongly to intensities, the crucial question is how an individual is able to maintain a vital charge without getting flooded on one side and frozen on the other side, how we can learn to ride the waves of energy without drowning or drying out.

The application of cathartic techniques helps a lot to mobilize repressed and frozen energies, but they also open the doors to uncontrollable intensities which are hard to contain at times. That was the reason why Stanley Keleman and David Boadella already in the early nineteen seventies moved away from the cathartic principle in favor of the formative principle, which teaches the individual much more to regulate energetic and emotional intensities. Today, with an increasing awareness of borderline processes in clients, of soft structures with weak internal organization and boundaries, and an increasing awareness of shock states in people, the formative principle becomes all the more important. The focus of us therapists is no longer so exclusively on the side of repression, energetic stasis and armoring, but also on the side of what Daniel Goleman calls emotional hi-jacking, the loss of control as people feel pushed beyond their tolerance thresholds of intensities.

Because of these dangers, body-psychotherapists became very critical of the old cathartic methods. Yet, again the pendulum seems to swing too much to the other side. Instead of learning different strategies to work with the body and energies, many therapists become too abstinent from the body and seem to avoid any forms of touch and somatic process work which might lead too closely to any forms of reliving traumas. Instead of naively think that reliving is healing and liberating, as believed in former times, nowadays the mood swings to regard reliving as re-traumatizing per se. What is often missing is an exact knowledge how to evolve body-psychotherapy to work with the intensity of wounds step by step without getting overwhelmed and to help re-organizing stuck places of paralysis or inappropriate patterns of fight and flight. To avoid somatic work here is limiting the chances of the clients to transform their stuck places.

Another issue which has been neglected in many somatic psychotherapies is the hijacking which takes place so often in our daily relationships, when conflicts push us emotionally out of balance and containment. These events are not necessarily related to early disturbances or shock traumata, they are part of almost everybody's adult life, no matter what the pathology is. We don't live in a culture which is very knowledgeable and wise to teach us how to handle these situations. Yet many approaches in couple counseling and therapy for example work with strategies to include the felt experiences of energetic and emotional events into constructive communications and to establish rules to deal with them in order to help people not to freak out and get hi-jacked by them. Again, this example shows how intimately connected the work with energy is with relational processes.

Yet to work fluently with mediating between energetic phenomena and relational processes requires specific skills from the therapist. It requires to be able to translate back and forth between language and non-verbal events. There are two difficulties which I regularly observe in giving supervision. One difficulty is to develop a somatically grounded phenomenological language, which means to be able to describe in detail what is happening in the body and to help the client to develop this precision as well. Instead, much language is metaphorical and abstract, never reaching the necessary close observation. The other difficulty is that language moves away from the phenomenology too early into realms of interpretation and meaning. Transference phenomena get interpreted and discussed before their precise description is clear. An excellent example how these difficulties can be solved is given recently by the Canadian body-psychotherapist Ian MacNaughton in his article "The Narrative of the Body-Mind", published in Energy & Character last year, in which he presents a case study of a couple therapy.

continued next page

. *Intersubjective constructions of energy concepts*

It is well known that objective knowledge natural sciences is in so far culturally ınstructed as it is based on intersubctively established codes of language. ientists agree on certain constructions order to describe natural phenomena and ws. The present discussions in bodyychotherapy about the energy paradigm e an example how people struggle to find common ground to understand energy and define their relationship to energetic ork. In this debate there are some mutuaccusations to be trapped in reducınism. George Downing thinks of Reich be a reductionist and Peter Geißler critizes body-psychotherapists to use the ıergy paradigm reductively to not look at lationships and the transference phenoena. But in these criticism there are again me confusions. In my opinion, these iticisms tend to equate the relational ork with the symbolic realm of mental presentations and language, and the matic work with a non-relational, so lled real body. Although Geißler distinıishes four levels of body, the real, mbolic, imaginary and transitional body, till miss a conceptual clarity for the fact at a lot of energetic events in the body, ough non-verbal by nature, have actually mbolic and relational meaning and signiance. As a consequence, Geißler and her analytical body-psychotherapists nd to overemphasize the verbal-symbolic alm and to underemphasize the non-verl energetic realm, not fully appreciating w much relationship is actually happenj through the body itself. The way we ove, breathe and form our contacts is eply shaped by relationships. The way are embodied is thoroughly dialogical. is simply not possible to work deeply with the body without stirring up these relational issues, although we can decide to avoid looking at them.

This is, in essence, the meaning of working with energy in somatic psychotherapies. If we remember that Reich looked at energy as the common functional principle of soma and psyche, we can recognize that energy manifests in constant fluctuations throughout our somatic and psychic structures. Even while we can talk about more permanent energetic types of individuals, as Heiko Lassek describes these in his book on orgone therapy, we have moment to moment modulations of our energetic states. These are not only influenced by relationships, but also by many other factors, mainly environmental and nutritional ones, but as far as relationships are concerned, our energies respond to and mutually influence our social encounters. The role of energetic work in somatic psychotherapies is not to deny this fact, but to learn to understand how the cycles of charge and the patterns of flow and coherence within us were shaped by past relationships and have the chance to develop and progress within the organizing fields of creative therapeutic relationships, as well as outside therapy. In this sense, the energy paradigm has lost nothing of its significance for health, well-being and human development.

5. Energy in practical body-psychotherapeutic work

If we want to understand Reich's common functioning principle for the purposes of practical work, we need to become clear that energetic work is not in itself identical with somatic work. Energy is at least deeply connected with both soma and consciousness. Energy manifests on different life fields as physical body and movement, as

feeling and emotion, and as mental energy. Yet how energy manifests on these life fields depends on how the morhpological structures of formations on these life fields permit energy to move and circulate. Let us look shortly at the dynamics between energy movements and structural pathways.

Soma, or our different bodies in the spectrum between gross and subtle, could be understood as the biological and subtle structures which are sustained and vitalized by energy. The structures of our body our bodies determine how energy is able to move through us and to empower us. In the same way, we have psychic structures which require some energy for their activation as well as they inform our energies to take certain directions and to serve certain purposes. These structures of soma and psyche influence the quantity, flow and coherence of energy for better or worse. If these structures represent a form of armoring, energy will be inhibited to support us in an optimal way. This can show either as a form of suppression or as a lack of containment and coherence. In the first case, energy is held, in the latter, energy gets scattered. Therefore, a lot of work needs to focus on clearing the structural pathways for energy to move through us. To the degree this is accomplished, we are supported by our energies and can move into the direction to directly increase our energy levels.

Based on this understanding we can say that formative work focuses on structures, their organization and the possibilities of re-organization and development, whereas energetic work focuses on how energy itself can be utilized to change and evolve these structures. Thus, formative and energetic work can be combined in a mutually supportive way. But if we increase energetic quantities without the formative principle of optimizing structures, we have a negative side-effect of also strengthening pathologies. If on the other hand we focus on formative principles without understanding the energetic basis, we might be less effective. Some energetic work can help to overcome structural problems, if it is not excessive and practiced on a continual basis.

If we assume that this mutual support between the formative and energetic principles works out well to optimize and fine-tune the interaction between somatic structures and energetic pulsation, we can look more specifically at the interaction between energy and consciousness. As energy is a support for the body, it is also a support for consciousness. A famous metaphor is the image of horse and rider. The horse represents energy and power, and the rider consciousness, direction and purpose. If both cooperate well, they are mutually supportive. Yet if either the horse or the rider are insufficient, achievements will be limited. Our consciousness needs energy to ride on and be effective, and the energy needs information where to turn to. Though rider and horse are different, they can become a unity in working together, or they might fall apart. For therapy the message is clear: we need to work on consciousness and energy interchangeably. Sometimes to help the horse is necessary, sometimes to help the rider. But neglecting the horse and to compensate by focusing on the rider will not succeed, and working with the horse without a rider will not succeed either. Which means, instead of separating the two, we use their differences to unite them. Without loosing either side, sometimes working with an emphasis on one of the sides might have more effect.

The mutual interaction between consciousness and energy allows for different

les of work. As both realms are dif-
entiated, we can work with each realm
arately at a time, knowing that work
either side will influence the other. Yet
oth realms of consciousness and energy
deeply connected, we can also work
ultaneously with both realms in learning
w to embody and energize language as
ll as to find language for the body and
ergetic phenomena.[3)]
his means practically that we should not
away to apply energetic exercises and
cesses in body-psychotherapy, but also
should not neglect thorough work with
sciousness and relationship either. And
need to learn how to translate between
e two.
I want to finish by summarizing my basic
ssage. Instead of abandoning the energy
radigm, in my opinion we need actually
constantly evolving understanding of
ergetic dynamics which empowers us to
come much more precise in applying
ergetic work. Instead of over-focusing
catharsis, we need more understanding
energetic systems in the body, and the
eans of balancing and building coherence.
the same time, we also need to overcome
e tendencies of splitting energy and
nsciousness, as well as energy and rela-
onal work. Instead of treating these
alms as mutually exclusive, we need to
derstand better their mutual interaction
d support, to build more bridges and to
ok for functional similarities. In this way,
dy-psychotherapy and its claim to
tegrate mind and body can truly become
achievement more complete than
proaches which deepen their psychology
ithout energetic and somatic depth.

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Notes

1) The fact that both Geißler and Downing are critical of the energy paradigm and therefore mentioned together in this sentence does not mean however that there aren't many differences between them and their respective approaches to working with the body in psychotherapy. In a personal communication George Downing emphasized that he is involving the body very actively in his work, focussing especially on possibilities for reorganization. The question how representa tives of the Analytical Bodypsychothera py like Jacques Berliner and Peter Geißler, beside many others, engage the body very differently than, say, George Downing, is a possibility which would be very inter esting to explore more, but this is beyond the scope of my article.

2) In response to this article and a shared panel discussion on the First Congress for Bodypsychotherapy in Berlin, May 1998, a dialogue started between Peter Geißler and myself about the role of energy in bodypsychotherapy. I am glad to say that this dialogue does not confirm that there is a paradigm war in the exchange of our ideas. Quite to the contrary, this dialogue has the chance to develop fruitful clarifications from both sides. It will need time to see how this exchange produces more public statements which reconcile conflicting positions on this subject. Also, short exchanges with George Downing confirmed that a concrete description of how the work with energy in bodypsychotherapy is understood would build more common ground for mutual agreements.

3) It needs to be understood that consciousness and language are not synonymous. Language is a highly evolved band within the whole spectrum of consciousness. As my summary of the discussion between Woodhouse and Dossey has shown,

consciousness and energy for example should not be perceived in a dualistic way, but rather as two sides of a common phenomenon. I'm grateful to George Downing who pointed out to me that at this stage of my article consciousness could be identified with language and verbal work. Yet this is of course not my intent. Talking here about the relationship between language, energy and body highlights the possibility to integrate verbal consciousness with otherwise unconscious somatic and energetic phenomena, as for example intentions, which in themselves also contain a consciousness, yet without words.

Key Words for Unlocking Our Unconscious

by Jerome Liss, M.D.

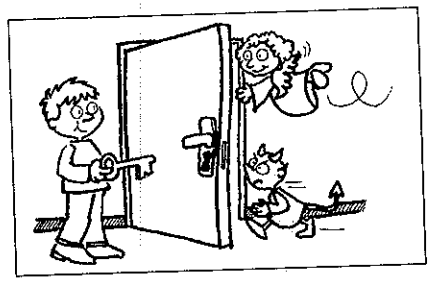
The key word is like a key

The door of the unconscious is locked. Key Words unlock the door.

When I am distressed and unhappy, I know something: "I am distressed and unhappy!" But why, how come, from what? Maybe a thought recurs again and again: "I shouldn't have done it!". "I am sad!" "It's the end of the world!", "Empty, nothing!" or "Take that, you bastards!"

These are all the key words of my unhappiness. They are the top surface of my awareness, the top of the iceberg, and there is a Hell underneath, but I can't get to it yet. And I'm afraid to get to it, or I just don't know how!

The key word opens the door to the unconsciousness



Through the Cellar-Bin or Out the Window

So my therapist-companion says, "*Say it again!*" And I begin to repeat my key phrases, stronger and stronger, to unbar the door, open the portholes, perhaps to open the cellar-bin of fears or just take a flying leap through my mental window. All to know better what is happening...inside.

"*Just repeat the key words, Dr. Liss? That's enough? But I thought that the therapist should do much more: interpret, probe, penetrate and cut through the resistances with a knife.*"

Dr. Liss: "*If I become your patient, please don't use your knife on me!*"

"*Stay With What Is.*"

So I am talking about a therapeutic approach that is very profound and yet that does not use the knife. It is respectful and safe.

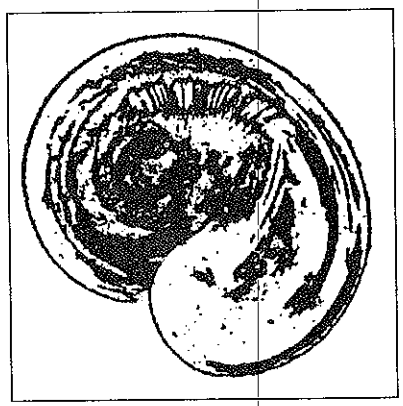
When I use the key words – whether I am patient or therapist – I am going deeper, but in the Gestalt sense, that is, with "what is."

Although any therapist can use Key Words, it is especially useful for the body-oriented psychotherapist. I'll go back to that in a moment.

Negative Interpretations Diminish The Patient's Self-Esteem

Let me give some background. When I lead various Body-Oriented Psychotherapy Training Groups, as guest trainer, I am always impressed by the skills and intuitions of the student therapists in terms of their conducting the body work: Helping patients reach deeper emotions with "just right contact," creating rapport and safety with body empathy, supporting the patient's newly found expressive freedom with mutual play, and so on.

Energy & Character



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